

# **An Appraisal of the Current State of Affairs in Nigerian Party Politics**

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**Abstract:** *Nigeria, like many other African countries, has had its fair share of democratic challenges, but it has also recorded some achievement over the years. There have already been calls across the country for some adjustments and improvements on the way political parties are run and managed, in the years to come. This paper sets out to analytically x-ray some of the challenges currently bedeviling the structure and workings of the political parties in Nigeria with a view to repositioning the ideological root and value system that these political parties are driven by. Using the secondary data where information is gathered and the content of same analysed the paper tends to showcase the salient strength and weaknesses inherent in the Nigeria political party system. It concludes that the political parties in Nigeria have always had to grapple with challenges owing to the fact that the formation of the parties are built along faulty lines, chiefly among which is the lack of a clear cut ideology and proposes amongst others that party members begin to imbibe the spirit of sportsmanship by displaying some sense of direction towards establishing a robust party manifesto.*

**Keywords:** *Appraising, Current, State, Affairs, Nigeria, Party, Politics*

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## **I. Introduction**

Two watershed events informed the imperativeness of a paradigm shift in the roles and functions of political parties around the globe, these were; the fall of the Berlin Wall and the emergence of democratic transition in Eastern and Central Europe and in Africa. Political parties were instrumental in bringing about the phenomenal alteration from authoritarianism to secular rule and then to democracies. They are also strategic tools that have helped in bringing about the change or transition from a one party regime or military regime or apartheid regime or strife torn country(s) to a competitive political order.

As a preamble it is pertinent to illuminate our minds on the conceptualization and dynamics of political parties, both in its abstract and practical forms. A political party is 'a social group' defined by Herbert Simon as 'a system of interdependent activities characterized by a high degree of rational direction of behaviour towards end that are objects of common acknowledgment and expectation', Simon (1962). It is different from other social groups, such as labour unions and other associations because of the unique functions a political party performs for the system, such as organizing for public opinion, communicating demands to the centre of governmental decision-making and political recruitment. This is why a political party is taken 'as a useful index of the level of political development in a society'. LaPalombara (1996) Hence the relationship between a viable party system and a democratic order is axiomatic.

The development of political parties in Nigeria dates back to the days of the struggle for political independence in the late 1940s with the early nationalists. In the pre-independence and the early post-independence periods, political parties in Nigeria were not strictly speaking 'ideologically rooted'; rather, they were regionally based and woven around individual politicians whom people perceived to be mentors. In the years that followed however, parties were registered based on the exigencies of the time, especially giving the military altercations that shrouded the period in question.

With the restoration of democratic government in 1999 a new hope was heralded for the proper composition of political parties and this in a certain way led to configuring a new approach to party politics in Nigeria. The procedure for registering political parties was liberalized, thereby, opening up the political space for mass participation in political activities in the country. Today, there are more than fifty registered political parties in Nigeria, even though only a few of them have been able to win elections at both state and local levels and this had led to the dominance of a single political party in the polity to the point that fears are being expressed that the country was drifting towards a one-party state. Opposition party members often jump ship and cross over to the ruling party both at the federal and states levels.

## **II. Development of Political Parties in Nigeria: An Overview**

Any analysis devoid of the evolution of the political parties as we know them today in Nigeria will be deemed incomplete as it will render the audience handicapped in trying to piece together the current equation and dynamics that have greeted the political parties within the polity. It is common knowledge that everyman is

a complex arrangement of his past; we will therefore dedicate this portion of the discussion to understanding the evolution of political parties in Nigeria.

The foundation of the development of the circumstance which came to be referred to as political party in Nigeria has its origin pierced to colonial rule, the formation of political parties started to rare its head as a result of the desire for self-rule (nationalism) which was anchored by the nationalist movements, this was what gave rise to what transmuted into political associations and subsequently the contest for legislative elections between 1922 and 1960 as the country moved from the phase of non-representative government (legislative council), to representative government and then to independence under which arose competitive party and electoral politics. According to Ngou (1989), he estimates that including the three major political parties, a total of fifteen others contested the critical election held in 1959. However, the more prominent of the parties in this emergent multiparty system between 1922 and 1960 were the following:

- i. The Nigerian National Democratic party (1923)
- ii. Union of young Nigerian (1923)
- iii. Nigerian youth movement (1937)
- iv. National council of Nigeria and Cameroon (1944)
- v. Northern Elements progressive union (1950)
- vi. United National independence party (1953)
- vii. United middle belt Congress (1955)
- viii. Bornu youth movement (1956)
- ix. Dynamic party (1955) etc cited by (Azikiwe, 1961:301-334, Hodgkin, 1961:195-197).

#### **Multiparty System in the First Republic [1960-1965]**

Sequel to the above; the multiparty system in the first Republic was enmeshed in regional and ethnic fervour. The parties had maintained a statue of been deeply rooted in ethnic orientation. It was this contradiction that was unleashed from 1962 onwards that continued to further balkanize and intensifies the division of parties along regional and ethnic lines; The declaration of emergency rule in the western region in 1962 as a result of ideological intra-party differences, the creation of mid-west region in 1963, the 1962-63 census controversy, the party realignment before the 1964 regional elections and the 1965 federal elections, involving the alliance between the NCNC and AG, on the one hand, and the NPC on the other hand, were all the after-product of this balkanization.

These unholy party alliances resulted to the political and constitutional crisis and civil unrest of October-December 1965, which precipitated the fall of the first Republic in January 1966. Elsewhere, it has been observed that the bulk of the literature embodying the attempts to explain the character of politics in Nigerian first Republic and the causes of the eventual collapse of that republic has pointed strongly to the factor of ethnic politics and particularly the nature of the political parties (Ibodje and Dode, 2005).

#### **Multiparty System in the Second Republic [1966-1984].**

It was in response to the problems which led to the collapse of the multiparty system in Nigerian first republic that led the Murtala/Obasanjo regime to put policies in place that will reposition political parties in Nigeria for national integration shifting away from the disintegrative outlook it possessed. Hence, the military attempted to solve the problem of ethnicity in the formation and management of political parties. In the electoral provisions contained in the transition programme of that period, most political parties that were to be registered, were required to have “national spread” to be national in out-look and programme, before being eligible for registration and subsequent participation in election (Ibodje and Dode, 2005). When the ban on partisan parties was lifted, associations came up for registration as political parties. In the end, five political parties, out of about fifty political associations that applied for registration were given the nod to function as political parties in the second republic. And these parties included:

- i. Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP)
- ii. National Party of Nigeria (NPN)
- iii. Nigerian People’s Party (NPP)
- iv. People’s Redemption Party (PRP)
- v. Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Cited (Yaqub, 2002).

The second republic once more collapsed on 31st December 1983, because of the anti-democratic practices of the party leaders (elites). These leaders used their positions to illegally acquire stupendous wealth through government contracts and other deals as well as massive rigging of election especially the 1983 election, while looking down on the people’s interests. The multiparty system in the second republic, notwithstanding all the efforts to avert or prevent irregularities, still witnessed the most rapid politics of aggrandizement and open robbery of the treasury (Yaqub, 2002).

### **Two-party System in the Third Republic [1985-1998]**

In the third republic of Nigeria (1985-1998), there was a shift in the political structure, the political system moved from being a multiparty system to two-party system, which inter alia; National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP). General Babangida inaugurated his administration's forty-six member political bureau on September 7, 1987 to reposition and restructure the political equation of the entire country; this team had the likes of Prof. Omo Omoruyi in it. The 1989 constitution that was promulgated by Babangida merely modified most of the contents of the 1979 constitution in terms of party formation, the 1989 constitution (which was never operationalized) and electoral laws differed from those of the second republic by making provision for only two political parties. This was after the disqualification of all the political associations that sought for registration as parties for allegedly being unable to meet the requirements spelt out. The National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) were finally imposed on Nigerians; however the only notable innovation of the two party systems in 1989 was that it introduced some elements of discontinuity between the past and 1989 in terms of *origin, composition, leadership selection, funding and the interest they serve*.

True to say, the Babangida regime proved to be what sceptics had always suspected; he developed a scheme aimed at perpetuating himself in office as president. When things got rough for that regime, Babangida was forced to step aside on August 20th, 1993 after annulling the presidential election of June 12, 1993. The Ernest Shonekan led interim National Government which took over from him was replaced in less than six months by General Sani Abacha (Yaqub, 2002). General Abacha instituted a national constitutional conference commission, which fashioned a new constitution for consideration by the Abacha junta. This constitution and many other political institutions established by that regime, events were to prove, were tailored towards the achievement of the Abacha self-succession bid "hidden agenda", like Babangida attempted before him. Under the Abacha's transition programme, eighteen political associations applied, for registration as political parties, out of which five were registered viz: The Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), The Grass-roots Democratic Movement (GDM), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) (Yaqub, 2002). The anti-democratic, self-succession activities of Abacha were to later negatively impact upon the ability of those political institutions to function democratically.

One of the parties (UNCP) became the major vanguard through which Abacha's self-succession bid was to be realized. Report had it that, the election that were conducted from the local government to the national legislature, the (UNCP) which is a dominant party swept more than 80% of the seats, hence while stressing this point, before setting the democratic proceedings that led to the fourth republic, General Abdulsalam Abubakar stated that: "In particular, democratization was marred by manoeuvring and manipulation of political institutions, structures and actors. In the end, we have only succeeded in creating a defective foundation on which a solid democratic structure can neither be constructed nor sustained". (Gen Abubakar, 1998). It was in line with the above reasoning that Abubakar regime dissolved the five political parties registered by the Abacha's regime.

### **Political Parties Today**

The failure of the two party system under the late Gen. Sani Abacha created space for the resurgence of the multiparty system in 1999, (Yaqub, 2002). The Abubakar's administration announced that it would not stay in office one day more than was necessary, his administration allowed the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to grant provisional registration to nine political parties, with the conditions that after the local government elections of that year, those that had 10% votes and above in at least 24 states of the federation would qualify to contest subsequent states and federal elections. Eventually, some parties like the Alliance for Democratic (AD), All People's Party (APP), and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were all registered. Some months into the fourth republic, with Obasanjo as the then President, politicians began to clamour for the registration of more parties. The government refused to register more political parties, hence unregistered associations went to court and won and this thus opened the floodgates for up to 30 parties in 2007. By the 2011 election however, the number of parties in Nigeria grew up to fifty, (Bello, 2011). These political parties in actual sense had an outlook that made them sensational and prone to division, due largely to this fragment and divisional tendencies the power of the incumbent party (the PDP) was immense. This meant that the other parties offered no real opposition in the legislative and apparently within the executive. It was observed across board that the activities of political parties became largely suppressed and dictated by the opposition owing to the fact that the opposition was 'clothed in immense power'. So therefore, the political parties at the start of the fourth republic failed to deliver democratic consolidation (in terms of functions and roles of political parties) due largely to the disposition and activities of political parties and party bigwigs, lack of clear-cut ideology, low level of political socialization, hangover and lingering effects of military dictatorship, money politics, corruption and bribery, the under-developed nature of the legislature, foot-dragging by the judiciary, lack of a vibrant civil

society (Advocacy) groups, and of great importance and concern to this work; the weak, fractured and un-institutionalized (fragile) posture of political parties especially of the opposition (Omotayo,2011).

Contemporaneously, apart from the then ruling PDP, no other party seemed to have the prospect of winning elections because; PDP was the dominant party (Omotayo, 2011). The 2011 general elections and activities of political parties had not entirely strayed from the part of previous party structure and activities in the past, it therefore leaves one to forcefully draw the conclusion that all the elections and activities of party(s) in the fourth republic shared a number of common denominators; characteristics and trend. First, they have been particularly characterized by massive frauds, intimidation and even assassination of political opponents, the brazen subversion of the “sovereignty of the vote” and controversy trailing the activities of parties and their agents. The party in power have often orchestrated designs and have generally perpetuated and maintained a culture of electoral violence and warfare. No election has been conducted without a great deal of controversy either before, during or after elections. Secondly, while there has been lack of continuity in violence and warfare, there has been lack of continuity in the political organizations through which both violence and warfare have been conducted. Each period has thus, produced new political formations reflecting not only the penchant for lack of principle and shifting allegiance among members of the political class but also the total lack of ideology by the members and that is why they are divided into antagonistic camps. From the analysis thus far, it is worthy of note that activities of political parties have negated the very principles of what they set out to preserve, which is the democratic values, and this has undoubtedly brought us political disintegration and instabilities.

A list of political parties in the fourth republic from 1999 up till 2011;

- i. People’s Democratic Party (PDP)
- ii. Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN)
- iii. All Nigeria People’s Party (ANPP)
- iv. Congress for Progressive Change (CPC)
- v. All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA)
- vi. Advanced Congress of Democrats (ACD)
- vii. Alliance for Democracy (AD)
- viii. Community Party of Nigeria (CPN)
- ix. Democratic People’s Party (DPP)
- x. Democratic Alternative (DA)
- xi. United Nigeria People’s Party (UNPP)
- xii. People’s Redemption Party (PRP)
- xiii. People’s Salvation Party (PSP)
- xiv. Progressive People’s Alliance (PPA)
- xv. Allied Congress Party of Nigeria (ACPN)
- xvi. Better Nigeria Progressive Change (CPC)
- xvii. Change Advocacy Party (CAP)
- xviii. Democratic People’s Alliance (DPA)
- xix. National Action Council (NAC)
- xx. National Unity Party (NUP)
- xxi. New Nigeria People’s Party (NNPP)
- xxii. Nigeria People’s Congress (NPC)
- xxiii. Social Democratic Mega Party (SDMP)
- xxiv. Republican Party of Nigeria (RPN)
- xxv. People’s Mandate Party (PMP)
- xxvi. Progressive Action Congress (PAC) etc (cited in Slizbeat, 2012).

### **The Birth of the APC and the Dilemma of Today’s Political Parties**

In 2015 the activities and structure of political parties in Nigeria took a slightly different dimension, leading the country to experience something unprecedented. In the lead up to the 2015 general elections political gladiators and bigwigs were beginning to reposition themselves, alliances were reformed, allegiances were repositioned, goalposts changed and this brought a wave of unprecedented change to the political clime. The dominate party PDP was beginning to lose the posture of being a strong indivisible party and the acceptability which it hitherto enjoyed was waning drastically, this was as a result of internal strife and tussle that greeted the party as a result of power play, godfatherism, interest, and the façade of power rotation or zoning which was the smokescreen employed by those who defected from the party – and subsequently saw to its demise – as a basis for dumping the party. The reality however is – unfortunate as it may seem – that the reasons highlighted above and more; ethnic allegiance, religious chauvinism, favouritism, nepotism and the activities of unrepentant religious and ethnic warlords are some of the driving force that galvanizes our political parties. Albeit the internal strife that overwhelmed the PDP led some of its aggrieved members to join forces with others who had

been agitated and struggling to wrestle power from the ruling party to join forces in structuring a new political party, which was a conglomerate of different political parties and hence the collapse of the PDP.

Formed in February 2013, the party that wrestled power from the ruling PDP in the 2015 general elections the APC is the result of an alliance by Nigeria's four biggest opposition parties – the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and a faction of the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) – merged to take on the People's Democratic Party (PDP), led by its Chairman John Odigie Oyejuna and its presidential candidate President Muhammadu Buhari.

The resolution was signed by Tom Ikimi, who represented the ACN (action Congress of Nigeria); Senator Annie Okonkwo on behalf of the APGA (All Progressives Grand Alliance); former governor of Kano State, Mallam Ibrahim Shekarau, the Chairman of ANPP's Merger Committee; and Garba Sadi, the Chairman of CPC's (Congress for Progressive Change) Merger Committee. The party received approval from the nation's electoral umpire Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) on July 31, 2013 to become a political party and subsequently withdrew the operating licenses of the three previous and merging parties (the ACN, CPC and ANPP). In March 2013, it was reported that two other associations – African People's Congress and All Patriotic Citizens – also applied for INEC registration, adopting APC as an acronym as well, reportedly "a development interpreted to be a move to thwart the successful coalition of the opposition parties, ahead of the 2015 general elections."

The Nigerian middle class saw the emerging APC as the alternative to the ruling PDP and this brought a lot of effects on the political calculations towards the 2015 elections. On November 25, Five Governors in the then ruling party announced their decision to join the APC. The 5 governors were Rotimi Amaechi (Rivers); Aliyu Wamakko (Sokoto), Rabi'u Kwankwaso (Kano); Murtala Nyako (Adamawa); and Abdulfatah Ahmed (Kwara). On December 18, 2013, Thirty-seven (37) out of the 208 PDP members in the House of Representatives also defected to the All Progressives Congress (APC). The defection was contained in a letter read by the Speaker, Alhaji Aminu Tambuwal, on the floor of the House bringing the total to 174. On January 29, 2014, 11 senators from the People's Democratic Party also defected to the APC. Among the senators that defected are Bukola Saraki, Mohammed Ndume, Danjuma Goje and Abdullahi Adamu. The senators communicated their decision to decamp to the APC in a letter addressed to the Senate President, David Mark. All of these culminated to give rise to what came to be known as the ruling political party after the 2015 general elections that left the APC triumphant.

### **III. Discussions and Analysis**

Yet these don't seem to be heady days for Nigerian political parties, although, the decade of the 1990s leading up to 2015 and as exemplified above has witnessed the massive spread of what Huntington (1991) referred to as the "third wave" of democratization to Africa, including Nigeria, leading to an unprecedented resurgence of multiparty politics, there is no controversy about the fact that the mere adoption of party pluralism will not automatically advance the cause of democracy without the institutionalization of certain institutional parameters to promote and sustain due process in theory and practice (See, Bratton and Van de Walle, 1992; 1997; Sorensen, 1993). One of the most complex and critical institutions of democracy is political party. Political parties, as "makers" of democracy, have been so romanticized that scholars have claimed that neither democracy nor democratic societies are thinkable without them. They not only perform functions that are government related, such as making government accountable and exercising control over government administration; and electorate related functions such as political representation, expression of people's demand through interest articulation and aggregation as well as structuring of electoral choices; but also linkage related functions, playing an intermediary and mediatory role between the government and the electorate (see, Moore, 2002; Lapalombara and Anderson, 2001; Simon, 1962).

Following Omotola (2005a) and Egwu (2005), Saliu and Omotola (2006) have pointed out that political parties can only cope effectively with these responsibilities to the extent of their political institutionalization in terms of structure, internal democracy, cohesion and discipline, as much as their autonomy. The element of party autonomy is very crucial. For, as Alli Mari Tripp has argued, and rightly so, those organizations that have asserted the greatest autonomy have generally been able to "select their own leaders, push for far-reaching agendas, and involve themselves in politics to a greater extent than organizations that have been tied to the regime/or dominant party, either formally or through informal patronage networks" (Tripp, 2001). A note of caution is necessary here to avoid confusion. The relationship between political parties and the state is a complex one. This is because it is the party that forms the government, the latter being the institution of the state. To now talk of a hard-line demarcation between the two may be unrealistic. Yet, the relationship should be well defined such that political parties, especially the one in power, as a critical segment of both the state and society, can enjoy some reasonable degree of "societal autonomy", the absence of which poses serious threats to "political liberalization, democratization and democratic consolidation", which is only a far cry away from what political parties in Nigeria are currently experiencing, (Tripp, 2001). In such a situation, multiparty democracy

can be adapted for the “politicization of ethnicity and further elite enrichment encouraging a confrontational and divisive system” (cf Dicklitch, 2002).

The import of the foregoing discussion, to take a cue from Saliu and Omotola (2006), is that the level of political institutionalization of political parties and their institutional strengths are directly correlated to their ability to discharge their ascribed responsibilities, and by extension, the strengths of democracy and this seems to be below average in the lives of our current political parties. When well institutionalized, political parties can serve as a set of mediating institutions through which differences in ideas, interests and perception of political problems at a given time can be managed (Olagunju, 2000; Omotola, 2005a). However, when the reverse is the case, the democracy project and the general system stand the risk of perversion and eventual breakdown. Whatever the case, it is important to note that at the very heart of the success or otherwise of political party is the important question of political ideology. The issue of ideology has been so central to the activities of political parties across time and space that Anson D. Morse (1896) has argued that ideology, being the durable convictions held in common by party members in respect to the most desirable form, institutions, spirit and course of action of the state, determines the natural attitude of a party towards every public question (cf. Iyare, 2004). In an incisive piece on “political party convention”, Richard Davies and Vincent J. Strickler (1996) similarly argue that “ideology functions as planks”, that is, single issue statements within the platform, the exact ideological orientation of which is often used as a bargaining chip in seeking party unity. Here, the platform connotes a statement of the official party position on a variety of issues. Okudiba Nnoli (2003) also concludes that ideology is a very crucial aspect of politics, not only by serving as a cognitive structure for looking at society generally and providing a prescriptive formula, that is, a guide to individual action and judgement, but also as a powerful instrument of conflict management, self-identification, popular mobilization and legitimization. It may, therefore, be correct to assert that the first and most important vehicle of a political party, under an ideal situation, should be its ideological stance.

In reality, however, this is seldom the case. Perhaps, due to the shallowness of democratic roots especially in within our political parties, other forces of identity particularly ethnicity and religion appear to have taken the place of ideology. The rising influence of money politics represents another crucial limiting dimension (see, Nugent, 2001a; 2001b; 2001c; 1999; 1995; Gros, 1998; Omotola, 2004).

#### **IV. Concluding Notes**

Nigeria, like many other African countries, has had its fair share of democratic challenges, but it has also recorded some achievement over the years. There have already been calls across the country for some adjustments and improvements on the way political parties are run and managed, in the years to come. Many have argued that Nigeria must necessarily adopt the methods that will guarantee the rights of its citizens to elect leaders of their choice as provided for in the country’s constitution. As Nigeria tries to consolidate its democratic framework and mechanisms, the multi-parties in Nigeria, need to exemplify a new level of commitment to the yearnings and aspirations of the people for more fundamental and sustainable development. The recently concluded 2015 general election in Nigeria recorded significant level of achievements and thus brought the world’s attention towards our political system, Nigeria apparently became a pace setter in Africa. But it leaves much more to be questioned concerning our democratic system.

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